

# Technical Assistance Bulletin

Office of Minority Health

Resource Center

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## Careful Concept Development Paves the Way to Effective Prevention Materials

*Before you commit time and resources to developing prevention messages and materials, you should know who is going to use the materials, and how. You should also be sure that you are not creating a product that already exists. These and other considerations are part of the concept development process.*

*This technical assistance bulletin presents guidelines for considering information about your target audience and using that information to plan effective alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) prevention materials.*

No formula can guarantee the success of prevention materials. But using a concept development process based on established health communication principles can help

*No formula can guarantee success, but using a careful concept development process can help you create ATOD prevention products that will get your message across.*

you to create products that will get your message across to the people you want to reach. The time you take to identify options, consider different approaches, and make conscious choices about messages and

materials will dramatically increase the probability that your plans will work.

Plus, by turning the results of your concept development process into a materials development plan, you can make sure every member of your group has a clear understanding about the material(s) you are going to produce.

### What Is Concept Development?

Concept development is the process of generating ideas before making final decisions about the development of prevention materials. While it is tempting to fall back on messages or strategies that have worked in the past, each target audience presents a unique set of challenges that call for a fresh, new approach.

The concept development process includes three steps:

Step 1: Identify the Issue or Problem

Step 2: Meet To Discuss the Issue

Step 3: Develop a Plan.

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## Getting Started: When Does Concept Development Occur?

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) promotes a six-stage *ATOD Communications Process* to guide the development of

*In relation to the Health Communications Process, the concept development process can be thought of as the conclusion of the Planning and Strategy Selection stage and the beginning of the Selecting Channels and Materials stage.*

materials, as illustrated on page 3. The first two stages of this process are Planning and Strategy Selection and Selecting Channels and Materials. The concept development process can be thought of as the conclusion of the Planning and Strategy Selection stage and the beginning of the Selecting Channels and Materials stage. Finalizing the concept for the prevention materials can link the preliminary discussions about the problem and potential strategies with the

second stage of the communication process, Selecting Channels and Materials.

Concept development is often done by a group so the members can stimulate new ideas by meeting together and discussing ideas and plans. When working on developing the concepts for prevention materials, it is important to raise questions and seek answers related to the target audience and the materials you plan to produce. In the course of your discussions, you are likely to find that

some of your questions have not been answered, such as:

- What would make the proposed materials attractive?
- What would give them greatest credibility?
- Which communication channels and formats will have the highest probability of getting attention?

These questions should be considered with an awareness of and close attention to the needs of the community or communities in which the audience lives, works, plays, studies, or worships.

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## Steps in the Concept Development Process

### Step 1. Identify the Issue or Problem

In your community, the need for prevention materials may or may not be clear. Parents or teachers may request that you address a specific problem, such as the distribution and use of marijuana on middle school campuses. Or reports in the media may reveal that underage drinking is prevalent on week-ends. It is also possible that the problems in your community are less obvious and require research and analysis.

The concept development process starts once the problem or issue has been identified and a planning group begins to consider solutions. These initial concept development steps should result in a statement of the problem and the reason your group or organization is addressing it.

*Steps in the Concept Development Process:*

*Step 1: Identify the Issue or Problem*

*Step 2: Meet To Discuss the Issue*

*Step 3: Develop a Plan.*

**Example 1:**

**Statement of problem.** Students in the middle school are distributing marijuana cigarettes and smoking them before and after school and during breaks.

**Statement of purpose.** Our organization will develop alternative activities and/or prevention materials to help students refuse marijuana and to encourage those who use marijuana to quit. Materials may also include pamphlets for parents discussing how they can discourage their children from using drugs.

**Example 2:**

**Statement of problem.** Pregnant women visiting the health clinic seem to be unaware of the dangers of drinking alcohol during their pregnancies.

**Statement of purpose.** Our organization will develop materials (brochure, pamphlet, or video) to be placed in the clinic's waiting room and materials for doctors and nurses to encourage them to introduce the topic of alcohol and other drug use into prenatal consultations.

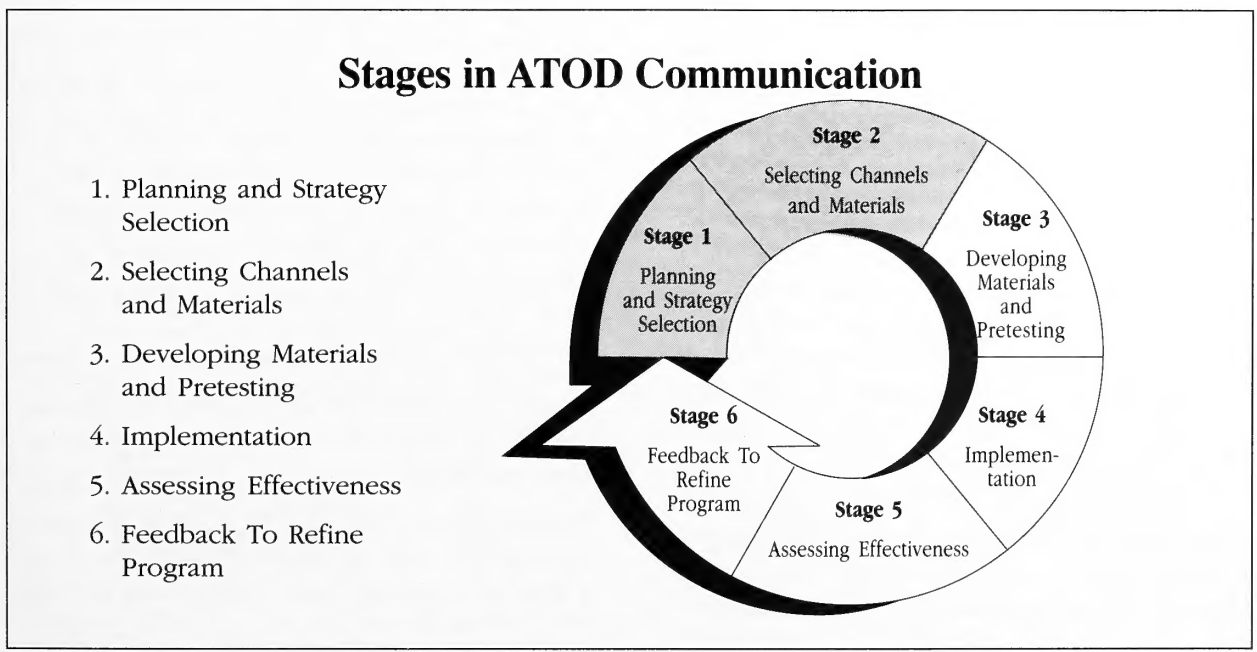
In the beginning, the statement of the problem and your organization's purpose are enough to act as a foundation for the concept

development process. However, as concept development progresses, the statements should be refined to include more information about the target audience and your specific objectives.

**Step 2. Meet To Discuss the Issue**

Once group members have considered the statements of the problem and purpose, the group should hold meetings specifically to discuss concept development. Agreeing to problem and purpose statements may be the first order of business at the concept development meeting. Next the planning group should address the 10 questions in CSAP's concept development outline included in this section on pages 4 through 7. While some people will be anxious to map out every step of the prevention strategy, the first part of the meeting should be devoted to expansive discussions and the exploration of possibilities, not final decision making. It is important to stress that there are no "right" answers to the questions being asked this early in the process.

*The planning group should address the 10 questions in CSAP's concept development outline.*



## Include Potential Intermediaries

If your organization does not have close ties to the proposed target audience, concept development meetings may be the best time to invite influential members of that target audience to participate. You may also want to include intermediaries in concept development meetings. Intermediaries are individuals or groups who have access to the target audience and can help distribute messages or materials to them. Intermediaries may

include representatives from community organizations (church, school, hospital), media outlets (newspaper, radio or television station), or influential individuals (physicians, teachers, clergy).

Do not wait until your materials are finished to recruit the help of intermediaries. They are much more likely to support your effort if they have had the opportunity to be involved in the process from the start.

### The 10 Questions for Concept Development

Addressing the following questions in CSAP's concept development discussion outline will help to discourage premature decision making. The questions can help you clarify the information that you already have gathered and apply it to planning the prevention material.

#### 1. Who wants this product?

If people have been asking for this product, make a list that could be turned into a distribution list at the appropriate time. Requesters might include gatekeepers (teachers, clergy, scout leaders) who would like to use the materials when they are finished. Or the list might include members of the primary target audience. Identify the role requesters will play in communicating, promoting, and distributing the prevention messages. Thinking about who is going to use the product and how will give the group a sense that there will be a useful outcome to their planning efforts.

If no one is asking for the material, examine why you think the community needs this product. Try to anticipate how the material

will be received and used. Identify changes you would like to see occur as a result of your product.

#### 2. Who needs this information?

In addition to the people who want the prevention materials, there may be people who need materials. Your target audience will not always include the people who are asking for the materials. For example, you may have requests from doctors who want the materials to give to patients. But the patients may be unaware that they have a problem; you may have to persuade them that the information is important. In other words, your materials may need to be persuasive for the audience to develop an interest in your message.

This means that you should carefully consider what appeal your materials should have. There are many options: humor, fear, personal

*Your answers to the first two questions will help you select the target audience.*

pride, community pride, reason. Your choice about the appeal will strongly influence how the audience accepts the message. For instance, young people take ATOD messages very seriously; they don't seem to like humorous approaches to these messages. However, if the audience is very anxious about a topic, such as HIV/AIDS, humor may make the message more palatable. You can appeal to the head or the heart, or both.

### **3. Who are the specific audiences?**

Your answers to the first two questions will help you select the target audience or

**One source of information** about potential audiences for your material is the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20852, (301) 468-2600 or (800) 729-6686. Ask NCADI about gaps in existing materials that your organization can fill. Also, ask about the Regional Alcohol and Drug Awareness Resource (RADAR) network, which may have a resource center in your region. You may discover that a product already exists that will fill your needs.

Questions that will help you to get the information you need when you call NCADI include:

- Are there materials available for your specific target audience on your chosen topic?
- If no, have there been other requests for similar materials? (That is, is there an audience outside your community for the product you plan to develop?)
- If there are materials available, have they been used successfully? Have they been evaluated? In what setting were the materials used?

audiences. (Remember that if you decide on multiple, dissimilar target groups, you may need different messages and materials for each.)

Decide what you know about your primary target audience and what you need to learn. Identify ways (such as focus groups, intercept interviews, surveys) that will help you to obtain the information you lack. Identify community gatekeepers (for example, a representative of a community organization — e.g., a church or school — who has direct contact with your target audience) who can help or hinder your access to this audience. Remember that your materials must appeal to gatekeepers (school teachers or administrators, clergy, scout leaders) as well as to the primary target audience.

### **4. How will this information be used?**

Based on the audience you want to reach, discuss how the information will be used. For instance, you might anticipate that a brochure will be read by patients in a doctor's waiting room. Or you may plan to develop an exercise for elementary school students to use in the classroom under the direction of their teacher. The potential use will influence the design of the product.

Perhaps a parent will see this material after a long day of work. Or someone might read your message on a bus placard on the way to work.

Try to find a setting that will give your audience the time to read and digest your message and the opportunity to adopt and use the ideas you present.

Keep in mind that the message and target audience may make its use in a particular setting unsuitable. It would be inappropriate to deliver an alcohol use prevention program targeted specifically for American Indian youth in a public school where these youth may already feel that they are set apart. In this

*Always keep in mind how the ATOD prevention materials will be used.*

setting, the program may be perceived to reinforce stereotypes about alcohol use among Native Americans. Having a representative of the target audience involved in the concept development process can help you to recognize and avoid strategies that will not work.

Try to anticipate barriers that might keep your audience from using your product as intended. For example, a display of materials in a community library will have little effect if the target audience never visits that library. Even if you choose the right channel to get the material to the audience, you may lose them if you choose the wrong format. A long, dense pamphlet may be tossed aside by readers with limited reading skills or attention spans.

### ***5. What format(s) should it have?***

Often groups start the concept development process with a specific format in mind ("Let's make a video on..."). Careful analysis of who needs the information and how to reach them will almost certainly affect your choice of format.

Following your discussion of question 4, identify the most appropriate format for the product. Do not limit yourself to the traditional brochures, pamphlets, posters, magazine articles, public service announcements (PSA's). Look for new ways to communicate your message. Consider messages that might be printed on grocery bags or dustjackets for schoolbooks. Perhaps you could persuade your community's Little League or other youth-oriented program to place a patch with a drug-free message on the sleeve of each player's uniform.

Many messages are more effective if delivered and explained by someone. For example, you might develop a script for shopkeepers to deliver to young people who hang out in their stores after school, along with a pamphlet for the youth and a poster for store windows. Don't limit yourself to just one type of material to get the message across.

### ***6. What reinforcement is needed?***

You may need more than one product. If you intend to ask an intermediary to distribute your material, you should develop a letter or fact

sheet to explain how and why the pamphlet has been developed. Audiovisual materials may require a discussion guide to help teachers or group leaders use your material effectively.

Reinforcement may take the form of spokespersons whose endorsements attract attention and lend credibility. It may be a preface written by someone with whom the audience is likely to identify or respects highly. It may take the form of delivery through an organization with whom the audience is affiliated. It may be the development of promotional materials, press announcements, or even a special launching event that underscores the significance of the messages and materials.

### ***7. What's the overall purpose?***

By this time in the concept development process, you should have a definite idea about what effect you would like your message to have. The effect may be increased awareness of a particular danger or of the availability of services. Or you may hope to effect a change in public policy, such as banning cigarette machines from locations where minors have access to them. As you develop your concept, make sure that your message and materials are consistent with your program's goal.

Reasonable expectations for prevention materials include raising awareness, increasing knowledge, or changing attitudes. You may also consider environmental changes (for example, changes in community norms) that might result from a persuasive public service announcement. While prevention messages and materials may not bring about behavior change directly, they can create a climate where individuals are more motivated to seek help or are less likely to begin using drugs in the first place.

### ***8. How long will it be current?***

Consider how time sensitive your message is. Try to anticipate developments in research, the political climate, or popular culture that might limit the currency of your message or your presentation. Hair styles and fashions in clothes must be trendy enough to compete

in the marketplace. But if they are too trendy, they may quickly become passé.

All materials will become outdated eventually. Keeping this in mind will help you to determine quantities to produce.

### ***9. How will it be promoted and disseminated?***

At this point in the concept development process, you have probably identified organizations and agencies that might help you distribute your materials. Consider whether your message will be compatible with the missions and values of those organizations. Select media outlets that should be approached. Identify intermediaries who could distribute your materials. Consider handing out materials at community events such as art fairs, athletic competitions, or concerts. Determine whose permission you will need to participate in these events.

Make sure to choose promotional strategies that fit the target audience. Consider

developing a radio PSA to announce the availability of your material if, for example, you are targeting an audience that is best reached this way. Radio may be the best channel for disseminating prevention rap messages to urban and rural teenagers. It is probably not the best way to reach doctors and nurses with a message intended to change an aspect of their professional practice. Be creative. Don't limit yourself to the tried-and-true methods.

### ***10. How will material be evaluated?***

Do not wait until you have distributed your materials to consider how they are to be evaluated. Pretesting (formative evaluation) your message and materials prior to final production will help ensure that they are effective and appropriate before they are produced. Once your materials are in use, you may want to plan a followup survey of individuals or agencies on your mailing list or include a bounce-back card so that recipients can easily provide you with comments.

## **Materials Development Plan**

Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Message(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Target Audiences: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Groups To Involve: \_\_\_\_\_

Format: \_\_\_\_\_

Distribution: \_\_\_\_\_

Promotion: \_\_\_\_\_

Pretest/ Evaluation Methods: \_\_\_\_\_

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Estimated Cost: \_\_\_\_\_



Tracking use of materials can help you identify needs for additional promotion, or another print run.

### Step 3. Develop a Plan

Once you have considered and discussed the 10 questions you should have the basis for a Material Development Plan. Use the form on

*The work of the planning group will be the basis for the Materials Development Plan.*

page 7. This plan may also serve as the basis for a formal proposal to decision makers in your organization or to intermediary organizations whose support you hope to enlist.

After you make decisions about these concept development issues, you may want to verify some of your assumptions by using a method such as focus groups to help you test your concept. (See CSAP's technical assistance

bulletin "Pretesting Is Essential, You Can Choose From Various Methods.")

The prevention materials that result from the concept you have developed, along with careful development and pretesting, can have a significant positive effect in your community.

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## Resources

CSAP Communications Team, 7200 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 500, Bethesda, MD 20814-4820. See box.

Office of Cancer Communications, National Cancer Institute. *Making Health Communication Programs Work: A Planner's Guide*, 1989. This guide to all aspects of health communications is available from OCC, Bethesda, MD 20892, (301) 496-5588 or (800) 422-6237.

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20852, (301) 468-2600 or (800) 729-6686.



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*You have our permission!*

### Developed and Produced by the CSAP Communications Team.

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Distributed by the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20852.

This bulletin is one in a series developed to assist programs that are working to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems. We welcome your suggestions regarding information that may be included in future bulletins. For help in learning about your audience, developing messages and materials, and evaluating communication programs, contact the CSAP Communications Team, 7200 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 500, Bethesda, MD 20814-4820, (301) 951-3277.